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AMERICAN NEGRO SLAVE REVOLTS

HERBERT APTHEKER

THE persistent and desperate struggles of the American Negro against slavery took eight forms, none of which have yet received anything like the treatment they deserve: (1) The purchase of freedom; (2) strikes; (3) sabotage; (4) suicide and self-mutilation; (5) flight—to communities of runaways, to the French, Indians, Canadians, Dutch, Spanish, Mexicans, British armies; (6) enlistment in federal forces—Negroes were with Prescott at Bunker Hill, with Perry at Lake Erie, with Jackson at New Orleans; (7) anti-slavery agitation—talking, writing—(Douglass, Tubman, Walker, Still, Steward and a host of others); (8) revolts.

Nothing in American historiography has been more neglected, nor, when treated, more distorted, than the story of these revolts. Out of Channing's thousands of pages, about five touch this subject and his treatment is, among the standard histories of Beard, McMaster, Rhodes, Hildreth, Schouler, Osgood, Bancroft, the most extensive. Sectional historians, with rare exceptions,¹ are worse, and Negro writers² are hardly better. The score of pages devoted to slave revolts by U. B. Phillips still remain the most complete record of this important chapter in American history. But his pretentiously "objective" account is actually a subtle apology for the Southern Bourbons.³

During the period of slavery the subject was taboo, and clear examples⁴ of censorship may be found. Yet sources yield enough evidence to demonstrate conclusively that the fear of slave revolts⁵ and

¹ Exceptions are R. Scarborough, *Opposition to Slavery in Georgia*; and H. S. Cooley, *A Study of Slavery in New Jersey*.

² See *Journal of Negro History*, vii, p. 361; xv, p. 112.

³ At times not so subtle, as in one dedication "to the dominant class of the south . . .", *A History of Transportation in the Eastern Cotton Belt to 1860* (New York, 1908).

⁴ C. H. Ambler, *Thomas Ritchie*, p. 25; *Writings of Monroe* (Hamilton Edition), iii, p. 208-209; compare letter from Camden, South Carolina, in *New York Post* of July 18, 1816 and in *Richmond Enquirer*, July 20; *Niles' Register*, xli, p. 180; dispatch of December 16, 1856 to *New York Weekly Tribune*; *New Orleans Picayune*, December 7 and December 24, 1856.

⁵ *Virginia Historical Register*, iv, p. 63; J. Ballagh, *History of Slavery in Virginia*, p. 91, note; *American Historical Review*, i, p. 89; *Writings of Jefferson* (Ford), vi, p. 349; H. M. M'Call, *History of Georgia*, i, p. 125; (E. C. Holland) *A Refutation of Calumnies . . .* p. 61;

the panic that ensued upon the discovery, or supposed discovery, of plots, or the suppression of revolts, were factors of prime importance in the social, political and economic life of the United States. This panic was no rare phenomenon. Indeed it was occasioned at least one hundred thirty times between 1670 and 1865.

An examination of the laws and customs regulating slavery, as reference to the footnotes will establish, substantiate the existence of this fear of revolt. These laws and customs at least deserve mention, for they indicate something of what the Negro slaves faced in conspiring and rebelling. Laws or customs provided for abysmal ignorance, patrols, passes, no arms to slaves, no resistance to whites, no anti-slavery agitation, and a policy of divide and rule: division between poor whites and slaves, domestic and field slaves and the drivers and mass of Negro slaves. Spying⁶ and the "Christian doctrine of resignation" reinforced these instruments of class rule in America's slave system.

There is no evidence of Negro slave revolts until well into the seventeenth century, and those that did occur in that century generally centered in Virginia. Moreover, it was not until the second decade of the next century that the outbreaks lost their character of mass flights and sporadic raids by outlaw bands and became organized revolts. It is important to observe that there were very few Negroes until about 1680 (three hundred in Virginia in 1649, only two thousand in 1670—about five percent of the colony's population).⁷ It was not until 1660 that they were legally declared slaves.⁸ Tobacco, mostly in Virginia, was the only staple crop, and it was mainly raised by indentured white servants until about 1675.⁹ There was no other staple crop and thus no plantation system in the other southern colonies until about 1730 when rice and indigo were introduced, and there was as yet little use anywhere in the country of Negro labor and little concentration of Negroes.

By 1715 one-third of the population of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Maryland (Georgia had no slavery until 1750) were slaves (46,700

E. P. Burke, *Reminiscences of Georgia*, p. 158; H. A. Herbert, *Abolition Crusade*, p. 11; F. L. Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country*, p. 30, 376-7, 474; R. Ogden, *Life and Letters of E. L. Godkin*, I, p. 124, 136-37.

⁶ *Life and Times of F. Douglass* (1882), p. 70.

⁷ L. C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in Southern U. S. . . .*, II, p. 1025, table 39.

⁸ Henning, *Statutes at Large*, I, p. 540, II, p. 26; H. Catterall, *Judicial Cases Concerning Slavery*, I, p. 50.

⁹ Gray, I, p. 308-09; P. A. Bruce, *Economic History of Virginia . . .*, II, p. 57; U. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, p. 75.

out of 123,510).¹⁰ Within five years Negro importation became important in Louisiana also,¹¹ and by 1754, when the plantation system, based principally on crops of tobacco, rice and indigo,¹² was well established, over thirty-six percent of the population of the four colonies mentioned above as well as Georgia, were slaves (222,000 out of 609,000).¹³ This was the proper setting for the real slave revolts, and from about 1720 to 1865, they occurred regularly.

Two conditions seem to have been important in precipitating these revolts. There was either economic depression or some unusual excitement concerning slavery, or, as was true in four great upheavals, (South Carolina 1737-40, Virginia 1800-02, South Carolina 1822, Virginia 1831), a combination of both.

In 1720 and 1737-40, South Carolina suffered from many conspiracies and revolts. The former period was marked by a drought and the beginning of the latter by a famine costing the lives of several slaves.¹⁴ There were revolts in Louisiana in 1730 and 1732 in which the mortality of the slaves was enormous. Although within the dozen years preceding 1731 about seven thousand slaves had been imported, in that year there were less than thirty-five hundred living.¹⁵ The Negro agitation in New York in 1741 came after the terrible winter of 1740-41, when the suffering of the exploited was acute and many starved or froze to death.¹⁶ From about 1794 to 1804 depression gripped the South causing a period of tremendous revolutionary activity, particularly in Virginia where the depression was worst.¹⁷ Precisely the same is true of the period 1820-31. During 1840-42 there were frequent plots and one important revolt in Louisiana and Mississippi, at a time when both these states were very hard hit by a depression following a disastrous fall in the prices of land, cotton and sugar.¹⁸

Temporary excitement seems also to have been at least partly responsible for many uprisings. The landing of Spotswood in Virginia started rumors among the Negroes that he had orders to free them

¹⁰ Gray, II, p. 1025.

¹¹ Gray, I, p. 335.

¹² Cotton and sugar became important in 1795.

¹³ Gray, II, p. 1025 (figures in text on Maryland, I, p. 348, do not agree with those in this table).

¹⁴ *Virginia Gazette*, August 19-26, 1737; Gray, I, p. 176.

¹⁵ Gray, I, p. 335.

¹⁶ W. Dunlap, *History of New Netherlands*, II, p. clxvi.

¹⁷ *Writings of Washington* (Ford), XIV, p. 196; Gray, II, p. 616-17.

¹⁸ *Mississippi Historical Society Publications*, X, p. 317-18; Gray, II, p. 643, 744, 1033.

and these led to the revolt of 1730.¹⁹ The Spanish offer of freedom and good treatment during the war between England and Spain in 1739 helped provoke the troubles of 1737-40 in South Carolina.²⁰ Many of the plots and revolts during the Revolution and the War of 1812 were stimulated by Tory and British offers of aid as well as by a growth of anti-slavery discussion during the former period. The West Indian uprisings starting in 1792 were probably important in causing risings in Virginia and Louisiana. The Missouri debates influenced the Vesey attempt of 1822,²¹ and there were further exciting incidents in the period 1826-31. The last troubles, starting in 1854 and going through the War, were no doubt affected by the Nebraska debate, the Kansas War, and the campaigns of 1856 and 1860. Large and sudden additions to the slave population is a factor of some weight in explaining some of the revolts, like those in South Carolina in 1730 and in Hinds and Madison counties, Mississippi, in 1835.²²

These three factors, then, or a combination of them, appear to be the driving forces behind the history of American Negro slave revolts.

Within the limits of this paper we can outline only the most important of these plots and revolts. It is worthy of note that they are all the main outbreaks which were recorded within definite periods of rebellious activity.

A conspiracy was formed by slaves in the city of New York on the first day of 1712, the plotters ". . . tying themselves to secrecy by Sucking ye blood of each Others hand. . . ." It matured very early in the morning of April 8, when about twenty-five of them set fire to a house and, armed with a few guns, clubs, and knives, waited for the whites to approach. About nine were killed and five or six seriously wounded. The alarm soon spread and soldiers hastened from the fort. In about one day most of the rebels were captured. Six were not for "one shot first his wife and then himself and some who had hid themselves in Town when they went to Apprehend them Cut their own throats." ²³ A reporter, who had stated that the outbreak "has put us into no small consternation the whole Town being under Arms," later remarked, "We have about seventy Negro's in Custody,

¹⁹ *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, xxxii, p. 322-23.

²⁰ R. Scarborough, p. 4, 14; *Collections of South Carolina Historical Society*, 1, p. 185.

²¹ L. Kennedy and T. Parker, *An Official Report of the Trials*, p. 64.

²² D. Rowland, *History of Mississippi*, II, p. 783; Gray, I, p. 94; II, p. 903, table 34.

²³ *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, xxi, p. 162-63.

and 'tis fear'd that most of the Negro's here (who are very numerous)²⁴ knew of the late conspiracy to murder the Christians."²⁵

Twenty-seven slaves were condemned, but six, including a pregnant woman, were pardoned. Twenty-one, then, were executed, and since the law passed in 1708²⁶ permitted any type of punishment,²⁷ the Governor was able to describe the modes of execution as follows: ". . . some were burnt others hanged, one broke on the wheele, and one hung a live in chains in the town, so that there has been the most exemplary punishment inflicted that could be possibly thought of. . . ." ²⁸ This outbreak, in part, influenced Massachusetts to forbid further importation of slaves in 1713, and led Pennsylvania, in August, 1712, to place a high duty on slaves which effectively discouraged their importation.²⁹

Among the main causes of the rebelliousness of the South Carolina slaves in 1737-40, acute economic hardship and Spanish persuasion have been mentioned. In addition, Negroes outnumbered whites four to one; many of them had been captured in Angola and thus were Catholics who were naturally drawn to the Spaniards.³⁰

Sunday, September 9, 1739, the Negroes on a plantation at Stono, some twenty miles west of Charleston, South Carolina, revolted and killed the two guards of a magazine. Arming themselves, they set out for the Edisto river, whose mouth is directly north of St. Augustine, Florida (then held by Spain). "Several Negroes joyned them, they called out liberty, marched on with colours displayed, and two drums beating," killing and burning all in their path in their bid for freedom, so that "the Country thereabout was full of flames."³¹ About twenty-five whites were killed, but not indiscriminately, for one, "a good man and kind to his slaves," was spared.³² On their march the Negroes met and almost captured Lieutenant-Governor Bull, who fled

²⁴ At this time there were about 1,800 Negroes and over 10,000 whites in New York. A. J. Northrup, *Slavery in New York*, p. 268.

²⁵ *Boston Weekly News-Letter*, April 7-14, April 14-21, 1712.

²⁶ This followed an uprising causing the death of seven whites and the execution of four slaves, including an Indian. *Documents Relative to Colonial History of New York*, v, p. 39.

²⁷ *Loc. cit.* 24, p. 266.

²⁸ *Loc. cit.* 26, p. 341-42.

²⁹ *New York Weekly Tribune*, September 22, 1855; A. W. Lauber, *Indian Slavery*, p. 290; C. P. Keith, *Chronicles of Pennsylvania*, II, p. 505.

³⁰ *Colonial Records of Georgia*, xxii, part 2, p. 233.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 234-35; iv, p. 412-13.

³² *Ibid.*, xxii, part 2, p. 234.

and helped spread the alarm. A gentleman, appropriately named Golightly, observed the slaves, and ran to the nearby town of Wilton where the Presbyterian minister, Archibald Stobo, was holding services. The good Christians, being armed as usual, and learning that their slaves had left the services of their earthly masters, set out in pursuit.³³ The Negroes, numbering from eighty to one hundred, who had by this time marched over ten miles, stopped to rest and refresh themselves. They were surprised by the whites, but, says a letter, "behaved boldly."³⁴ One account reads:³⁵

They gave 2 Fires, but without any damage. We return'd the Fire and bro't down 14 on the spot; and pursuing after them, within 2 Days kill'd twenty odd more, and took about 40; who were immediately some shot, some hang'd, and some Gibbeted alive. A Number came in and were seized and discharged; and some are out yet, but we hope will soon be taken.

About twenty escaped and ten were overtaken thirty miles to the south. They "fought stoutly for some time and were killed on the Spot."³⁶

Early in June, 1740, a plot of slaves involving about two hundred Negroes in and about Charleston was discovered a short time before the uprising was to have broken out. On the day set about one hundred fifty Negroes had gathered, but while yet unarmed, were attacked by the whites. Fifty were captured and hanged, ten a day.³⁷ In this same month, a terrific fire swept the city doing well over a million pounds damage and necessitating aid from other colonies. Although it was first ascribed to the slaves, this charge was later denied. The cause is not definitely known, but it is certain that in the summer of 1741 at least two Negroes were burnt here for incendiary acts.³⁸

It is this revolutionary activity, together with the Negro's persistent attempts to run away, that were given prominent places in the arguments of leading statesmen connected with the Georgia enterprise, like Oglethorpe, Stephens, Martyn, Egmont, for instituting a

³³ *South Carolina History and Genealogy Magazine*, x, p. 28; D. D. Wallace's account, *History of South Carolina*, I, p. 373 f. differs.

³⁴ Cf. footnote ³⁰.

³⁵ *Boston News-Letter*, November 1-8, 1739.

³⁶ Cf. footnote ³⁴.

³⁷ *Collections Georgia Historical Society*, I, p. 173; *Boston News-Letter*, July 3-10, 1740.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, January 15-22, April 30-May 7, 1740; July 7, August 15, August 27-September 3, September 24-October 1, 1741.

prohibition of Negroes in that colony, which lasted until 1750.³⁹ South Carolina itself passed laws in 1740 for the purpose of lessening the danger. Slave importations were taxed, and the funds so raised were designated for the importation of white Protestant settlers. At the same time rather vague laws were passed requiring better food and clothing for slaves and providing that they should not be worked over fourteen hours a day in winter or fifteen hours in summer.⁴⁰

The Negro agitation in New York City in 1741 has been both interpreted by historians as a bona-fide conspiracy and dismissed as a complete frame-up.⁴¹ A combination of the two attitudes is probably the correct one. The winter had been unusually severe, discontent had been expressed at the trials, and there had been many fires (in Hackensack, New Jersey,⁴² where two Negroes were burnt, as well as in New York). On the other hand, some contemporaries doubted the existence of a plot, and the testimony shows that the star witness was a liar. The discontent and the war with Spain may also have been the reasons for a frame-up, and rewards or tortures vitiate many of the confessions. Furthermore, the one full contemporary record was written by one of the judges, Horsmanden, who was, obviously, out to prove a serious plot.

From these facts, one may logically decide that there was trouble but that it was not so serious as Horsmanden would have us believe in his volume and certainly not so serious as to warrant, from the slave owner's viewpoint, the terrible punishments inflicted. Concerning the terror there is no question. Altogether about one hundred fifty Negroes and twenty-five whites, including seventeen soldiers, were arrested. Four whites and thirteen or fourteen Negroes were burnt. Eighteen Negroes were hanged, two in chains. Seven who were indicted were never found, and about seventy were banished.⁴³

The struggle of the American Negro against slavery during the revolutionary period, and during the War of 1812, took mainly the forms of flight and enlistment. This may account for the small number

³⁹ Cf. *Colonial Records of Georgia*, I, p. 50; Scarborough, p. 9, 12, 37, 73.

⁴⁰ D. D. Wallace, *Henry Laurens*, p. 82; *Annual Report of American Historical Association*, 1895, p. 657; E. Channing, *History of United States*, II, p. 391.

⁴¹ Beard, *Rise of American Civilization* (1936), I, p. 81; *Magazine of American History*, XI, p. 414.

⁴² H. S. Cooley, p. 43; *New Jersey Historical Society Proceedings*, 1874, p. 179.

⁴³ D. Horsmanden, *The Negro Conspiracy . . .*, New York, 1744, reprinted 1810, 1851

of revolts during these periods,⁴⁴ though conspiracies and rumors of conspiracies abounded. Two fairly serious outbreaks did, however, mark the first period, one, notwithstanding Bassett's denial, in North Carolina in 1775, the other in Georgia in 1776.⁴⁵

The factors making for the many revolts of the 1790s and the early 1800s, the depression and the West Indian slave outbreaks, have already been pointed out. The most important instances will now be sketched.

A plan for revolt in Pointe Coupée Parish, Louisiana, in April, 1795,⁴⁶ never was carried out because of betrayal after disagreement as to method. It appears certain that whites were implicated and three were banished. A group of Negroes attempted to rescue their imprisoned comrades but failed, twenty-five of their number being killed. Twenty-three Negroes were hung and their bodies displayed from New Orleans to Pointe Coupée, some one hundred and fifty miles away. In consequence, Carondelet, the governor, forbade by proclamation continuance of the slave trade, a prohibition which lasted until the territory came under the jurisdiction of our own free nation.⁴⁷

The year 1800 is the most important one in the history of American Negro slave revolts. It is the birth year of John Brown and Nat Turner, the year in which Denmark Vesey bought his freedom, and the year of Gabriel's attempt.

The Governor of Virginia, Monroe, and the military authorities of Richmond had been warned of rumors of revolt as early as August 10, but Monroe heard nothing definite until two o'clock in the afternoon of August 30, the day set for its outbreak. At that time Mr. Mosby Sheppard told him that his slaves, Tom, and, ironically enough, Pharoah, had said that a Negro uprising was to occur that very evening.⁴⁸ Military precautions were immediately taken, Monroe even appointing three aides for himself. Although Sheppard's information

⁴⁴ H. B. Stowe, in her novel, *Dred* (II, p. 302, Boston, 1856), and W. H. Siebert in his *The Underground Railroad* (p. 340, New York, 1899), suggested that the fact that many Negroes always fled served as a safety-valve and diminished the number of slave revolts.

⁴⁵ J. S. Bassett, *Slavery . . . Colony of North Carolina*, p. 62; but see, *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, x, p. xxiii; S. Ashe, *History of North Carolina*, I, p. 435-36; F. Martin, *History of North Carolina*, II, p. 353; *South Carolina History and Genealogical Magazine*, IV, p. 205.

⁴⁶ Phillips puts it in 1796. His account distorts as usual; it is a thorough understatement. (*American Negro Slavery*, p. 474, New York, 1918.)

⁴⁷ A. Phelps, *Louisiana . . .*, p. 171-72.

⁴⁸ *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, IX, p. 128, 134; see A. Bontemps' recent novel, *Black Thunder*.

was correct and on that night about one thousand slaves, armed with clubs and swords which they had "been making ever since last harvest," had gathered some six miles outside of Richmond, these precautions were unnecessary, for there occurred a tremendous rainstorm flooding rivers, tearing down bridges and making military operations impossible.⁴⁹

The chosen general of these Negroes was Gabriel, slave of Thomas Prosser of Henrico, a twenty-four-year-old giant of six feet two, who had intended "to purchase a piece of silk for a flag, on which they would have written 'death or liberty.'" Another leader was Jack Bowler, four years older and three inches taller than Gabriel, who felt that "we had as much right to fight for our liberty as any men." Solomon and Martin, brothers of Gabriel, were prominent too. The former conducted the sword making, the latter bitterly opposed delaying the revolt: "Before he would any longer bear what he had borne, he would turn out and fight with his stick."⁵⁰

Scores of Negroes were arrested, every county captain in the state was warned, and over six hundred fifty soldiers guarded Richmond.⁵¹ Gabriel was captured in Norfolk on September 25 and sent to Richmond. He was tried and condemned but his execution was postponed for three days until October 7, in the hope that he would talk. Monroe himself interviewed him, but reported that "From what he said to me, he seemed to have made up his mind to die, and to have resolved to say but little on the subject of the conspiracy." About thirty-five Negroes were executed. Two condemned slaves escaped from the Westmoreland jail.⁵²

Jefferson pointed out⁵³ to Monroe that "The other states & the world at large will forever condemn us if we indulge a principle of revenge, or go one step beyond absolute necessity. They cannot lose sight of the rights of the two parties, & the object of the unsuccessful one." Ten were reprieved and banished.

It is not known how many Negroes were involved. One witness said two thousand, another six thousand, and one ten thousand.⁵⁴ Monroe stated:⁵⁵

⁴⁹ *Works of Monroe*, III, p. 234; *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, IX, p. 141.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, IX, p. 151, 160, 165.

⁵¹ *Monroe*, III, p. 242.

⁵² *Monroe*, III, p. 213; *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, IX, p. 160.

⁵³ *Jefferson*, VII, p. 457-58.

⁵⁴ *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, IX, p. 141, 164, 165.

⁵⁵ *Monroe*, III, p. 239, 216-18.

It was distinctly seen that it embraced most of the slaves in this city [Richmond] and neighbourhood, and that the combination extended to several of the adjacent counties, Hanover, Caroline, Louisa, Chesterfield, and to the neighbourhood of the Point of the Fork; and there was good cause to believe that the knowledge of such a project pervaded other parts, if not the whole of the State.

He did not, however, believe that it extended "to any State South of us," yet there were conspiracies and panic in North Carolina. A new ordinance (passed in July) requiring hired slaves to wear badges and masters to pay fees for the privilege of hiring out their slaves in Charleston, indicated the restlessness there.⁵⁶ The nation, from Massachusetts to Mississippi, was terror-stricken; the former state provided for the removal of many free Negroes and the governor of the latter state issued a hundred circulars to the leading planters urging vigilance, while its lower house passed, in 1802, a bill which was killed in council, prohibiting importation of male Negroes.⁵⁷ Gabriel's conspiracy was followed by the establishment of a guard of sixty-eight men for the capital at Richmond together with a night watch for each of its wards. Resolutions favoring federal aid in colonizing "bad" Negroes were passed and Monroe earnestly but vainly pressed the matter.⁵⁸ The colonization society was finally formed in 1817, following a year of considerable unrest on the part of the slaves.

An interesting feature of Gabriel's attempt was that the Negroes expected, or, at least, hoped that the poorer whites would join them.⁵⁹ Moreover, they had intended to spare Frenchmen, Quakers, and Methodists,⁶⁰ and, indeed, testimony directly implicating two Frenchmen

⁵⁶ S. Ashe, p. 185; *Charleston City Gazette*, July 18, 1800. Rumors of a great conspiracy, as the *Hartford American Mercury*, October 16, 1800, said, were "wholly false" and probably originated in the desire of the Federalists to discredit Jefferson and lay the blame for the unrest upon his "wild, anarchistic" ideas.

⁵⁷ G. H. Moore, *Notes on Slavery in Massachusetts*, p. 231-37; D. Rowland, *History of Mississippi*, II, p. 631-32; *Mississippi Territorial Archives*, I, p. 311-312, 373-78; Gray, II, p. 688.

⁵⁸ *Atlantic Monthly*, x, p. 337-45; M. N. Stanard, *Richmond*, p. 85; Monroe, III, p. 292-95, 336-38.

⁵⁹ *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, IX, p. 141, 164.

⁶⁰ One witness added poor white women and one said young women, intimating that the last exception did not have the purest motives. This was mentioned but once, and implicitly contradicted many times, yet most writers on this have made rape one of the certain and prime purposes of the Negroes. This is the most flagrant kind of distortion. Most contemporary reports of plots and almost all later accounts of them put rape down as one of the aims. *Yet there is no case of an attack on a white woman in the history of Negro revolts.* The chauvinistic historians may storm or, as is frequent, resort to false-

was offered.⁶¹ These exceptions are easily explained. The current slogan of the French Revolution, "liberty, equality, fraternity," was enough to win the respect of these slaves, while the consistent opposition of the Quakers to slavery won the Negroes' friendship. Methodists, members of an essentially frontier church, were strongly democratic and equalitarian, and gave trouble to the slavocracy until abolition.

Evidence concerning the plots in Virginia and North Carolina in 1801-02 is not as full as that for 1800, but an informed contemporary, the editor of the Norfolk *Herald*, felt ⁶² that the latter threat was "not near so formidable" as that of 1802. Certainly hundreds of Negroes were arrested, particularly in Norfolk, Petersburg, and Richmond, and in Martin and Bertie counties, North Carolina. About ten to fifteen slaves were executed in Virginia and fifteen or twenty in North Carolina. Some were transported, others cropped, and many lashed.⁶³ These plots were betrayed by confidential slaves.⁶⁴ But there is quite convincing evidence that the poor whites were allied with the Negroes. It appears in a letter of John B. Scott and in the testimony of a slave, Lewis, on two different occasions that whites, "the common run of poor white people," were to aid the slaves.⁶⁵ A slave, Arthur (probably Arthur Farrar, to whom Lewis refers), is reported as having made the following recruiting speech: ⁶⁶

I have taken it on myself to let the country be at liberty this lies upon my mind for a long time. Mind men I have told you a great deal I have joined with both black and white which is the common men or poor white people, mulattoes will join with me to help free the country, although they are free already. I have got 8 or 10 white men to lead me in the fight on the magazine, they will be before me and hand out guns, powder, pistols, shot and other things that will answer the purpose . . . black men I mean to lose my life in this if they will take it.

What actually did happen to this "docile, contented" Negro slave is not known.

hood, but nevertheless this remains a fact. *Ibid.*, ix, p. 152, 171; cf. Howison, *Virginia*, II, p. 391; Ballagh, p. 92.

⁶¹ *Loc. cit.* ⁶⁰, p. 152, 165.

⁶² Quoted in New York *Evening Post*, June 21, 1802.

⁶³ *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, ix, p. 270-72; 274-75, 279, 293-310; *Post*, June 18, 21, 23, 25, 28, July 10, 1802, December 1, 1801; Bassett, *state . . .*, p. 94; Ashe, II, p. 186; Wertenbaker, *Norfolk*, p. 140; Monroe, III, p. 344-45, 346, 348-49.

⁶⁴ *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, x, p. 82.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, ix, p. 294, 298, 300.

⁶⁶ *Journal of Negro History*, xvi, p. 161.

On the afternoon of January 9, 1811,⁶⁷ the people of New Orleans were thrown into the "utmost dismay and confusion" on discovering wagons and carts straggling into the city filled with people whose faces "wore the masks of consternation" and who told of having just escaped from a "miniature representation of the horrors of St. Domingo." Governor Claiborne ordered out all patrols, forbade male Negroes from "going at large" and, though the "day was rainy and cold and the roads uncommonly deep," soldiers were immediately dispatched to the center of the trouble, thirty-five miles away. General Hampton, leading four hundred militia and sixty regular United States troops, left from New Orleans, and Major Milton, with two hundred soldiers, left Baton Rouge, and by forced marches arrived at the scene of action at about midnight of the ninth. Here were to be seen about four hundred Negroes, "the most active, prime slaves," armed with scythes and cane-knives, and a few guns. To this number had grown the band, led by a mulatto, Charles, which had revolted from a Mr. Andry and had since marched some fifteen miles, devastating and killing⁶⁸ all in its path, with drums beating and flags flying, "determined no longer to submit to the hardships of their situation."

General Hampton did not order his four hundred sixty men to attack until about 4:30 A.M., when he thought the Negroes were surrounded. But they rang "the alarm bell, and with a degree of extraordinary silence for such a rabble, commenced and affected their retreat up the river." They were then met by Major Milton's force of two hundred men and soon "the whole of the banditti [a favorite term] were routed, killed, wounded, and dispersed." Sixty-six were shot or executed on the spot, seventeen were later reported missing and "are supposed generally to be dead in the woods, as many bodies have been seen by the patrols." Sixteen were taken prisoners and sent to New Orleans for trial. They were executed and their heads strung on poles at intervals from the city to Andry's plantation. What more occurred there in 1811⁶⁹ cannot be definitely stated but this paragraph from a New Orleans paper is suggestive:⁷⁰

⁶⁷ This account and all quotations are from letters and reprints in the *New York Evening Post*, January 15, February 19, 20, 26, 27, 1811.

⁶⁸ How many were killed is not known. The governor said "several."

⁶⁹ Gayarre is his account of this (*History of Louisiana*, fourth edition, New Orleans, 1903, IV, p. 267-68) tells of one well-armed white who successfully held off the "cowardly" Negroes. His citation is F. X. Martin and nothing like that is to be found there; and it has been found nowhere else. Accounts are in F. Martin, *History of Louisiana*, II, p. 300-01; A. Fortier, III, p. 78-79; A. Phelps, p. 249-50.

⁷⁰ Paper's name not given. In *New York Evening Post*, February 27, 1811.

We are sorry to learn that a ferocious sanguinary disposition marked the character of some of the inhabitants. Civilized man ought to remember well his standing, and never let himself sink down to a level with a savage; our laws are summary enough and let them govern.

Early in 1816 Virginia was rocked by an indigenous John Brown, one George Boxley. In appearance he was anything but like Brown, but in ideas he was well nigh identical. Boxley was between thirty and forty years of age, six feet one or two inches tall, with a "thin visage, of a sallow complexion, thin make, his hair light or yellowish, (thin on top of his head, and tied behind)—he stoops a little in his shoulders, has large whiskers, blue or grey eyes, pretends to be very religious, is fond of talking and speaks quick."⁷¹ Contemporaries were in doubt as to "whether he is insane or not" since he openly "declared that the distinction between the rich and the poor was too great; that offices were given rather to wealth than to merit; and seemed to be an advocate for a more leveling system of government. For many years he had avowed his disapprobation of the slavery of the negroes, and wished they were free."⁷²

Late in 1815 Boxley formed a conspiracy in Spotsylvania, Louisa and Orange counties, but it was betrayed by a slave woman. Early in 1816 about thirty Negroes were arrested. Boxley, after vainly trying to organize a rescue party, fled. He finally surrendered, but with the flame of a candle and a file smuggled to him by his wife, he escaped in May, and was never recaptured, though a \$1,000 reward was offered. About six Negroes were executed and the same number transported.⁷³ A month after his escape a considerable plot was uncovered by a confidential slave whose identity was never revealed, in Camden, South Carolina. It is interesting that the rising was to have taken place on July fourth. Many were implicated, and six were hanged. The state purchased the informer's freedom for \$1,100 and enacted a law granting him fifty dollars a year for life.⁷⁴

Two considerable expeditions against communities of runaways who⁷⁵ harassed slaveowners were carried through in 1816, one near

⁷¹ Governor's reward notice in *Richmond Enquirer*, May 22, 1816.

⁷² *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, x, p. 433-35.

⁷³ *Ibid.*; Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, p. 476; *Journal Negro History*, xvi, p. 166-67; *New York Post*, April 16, 1816; *Richmond Enquirer*, May 22, 29, 1816.

⁷⁴ *New York Evening Post*, July 18, 1816; (E. C. Holland), *A Refutation*, p. 74-77; H. T. Cook, *Life of D. R. Williams*, p. 130; H. M. Henry, *Police Control . . . South Carolina*, p. 151.

⁷⁵ H. T. Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

Ashepoo, South Carolina, and the other against the abandoned British fort, called Negro Fort, at Appalachicola Bay, Florida. The Milledgeville (Georgia) *Journal* of June 26, 1816, had complained against the latter "establishment so pernicious to the Southern States" and demanded: "How long shall this evil, requiring immediate remedy, be permitted to exist?" A short time, indeed, it turned out to be. In July, United States troops accompanied by Indians set out for the fort. It withstood a siege for about two weeks, but surrendered on July 27, after a direct hit from a cannon had killed two hundred seventy men, women and children. Out of the original three hundred thirty occupants only forty survived.⁷⁶ This haven for fugitive slaves and base for their attacks on American slaveholders was eliminated by the annexation of Florida in 1819, after the first Seminole War.

A free Negro, Moses, betrayed a slave plot in Goochland County,⁷⁷ Virginia, in 1822, but that same year, in Charleston, another free Negro, Denmark Vesey, attempted to be a real Moses. He read to the slaves "from the bible how *the children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt from bondage*." If his companion were to bow "to a white person he would rebuke him, and observe that all men were born equal, and that he was surprised that any one would degrade himself by such conduct; that he would never cringe to the whites, nor ought any who had the feelings of a man." One slave stated that "Vesey said the negroes were living such an abominable life, they ought to rise. I said I was living well—he said though I was others were not. . . ." He had not heeded the urgings of the slaveowners for free Negroes to go to Africa, "*because he had not the will, he wanted to stay and see what he could do for his fellow-creatures*," including his own children, who were slaves.⁷⁸ Most of the other Negroes felt as Vesey did. Two of the rebels said, "They never spoke to any person of color on the subject, or knew of any one who had been spoken to by the other leaders, who had withheld his assent." Nevertheless the leaders feared exposure, and it came. One of them, Peter Poyas, had warned an agent, "Take care and don't mention it to those waiting men who receive presents of old coats, etc., from their masters, or

⁷⁶ C. M. Brevard, *A History of Florida*, 1, p. 42-45.

⁷⁷ J. Russell, *Free Negro in Virginia*, p. 169.

⁷⁸ J. Hamilton, *Negro Plot*, p. 36; L. H. Kennedy and T. Parker, *Official Report . . .*, p. III, 20, 87-88. Emphasis as in original.

they'll betray us. . . ." The traitor was Devany, slave of Colonel Prioleau.⁷⁹

Vesey had set the date for the second Sunday in July. Sunday was selected because on that day it was customary for slaves to enter the city, and July, because many whites would then be away. The betrayal led him to put the date ahead one month, but Vesey could not communicate with his country confederates, some of whom were eighty miles outside the city.⁸⁰ Peter Poyas and Mingo Harth, who were the two leaders first arrested, behaved "with so much composure and coolness" that "the wardens were completely deceived." Both were freed on May 31 although spies were put on their trails. Another slave, William, gave further testimony and more arrests followed, the most damaging of which was that of Charles Drayton, who agreed to act as a spy. This led to complete disclosure.⁸¹ One hundred thirty-one Negroes were arrested in Charleston and forty-seven condemned. Twelve were pardoned and transported, but thirty-five were hanged. Twenty were banished and twenty-six acquitted, although the owners were asked to transport eleven of these. Thirty-eight were discharged by the court. Four white men, American, Scottish, Spanish, and German, were fined and imprisoned for aiding the Negroes despite the fact that their aid appeared to be only verbal.⁸² Although the leaders had kept lists of their comrades, only one list and part of another was found. Moreover, most of them followed the admonition of Poyas, "Die silent, as you shall see me do," and so it is difficult to say how many Negroes were involved.⁸³ One witness said 6,600 outside of Charleston, another said nine thousand altogether were involved. The plan of revolt, comprising simultaneous attacks from five points and a sixth force on horseback to patrol the streets, further indicated a very considerable number of conspirators.⁸⁴ The preparations had been thorough. By the middle of June the Negroes had made about two hundred fifty pike heads and bayonets and over three hundred daggers. They had noted every store containing any arms and had given instructions to all slaves who tended or could easily get horses

⁷⁹ Kennedy and Parker, p. 26, 21-22.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34-35.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48 ff.; see also *Atlantic Monthly*, vii, p. 728-44.

⁸² Kennedy and Parker, p. 188 and appendix.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 25, 42; see also A. Grimké, *Right on the Scaffold*. . . .

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27, 38; (Hamilton), p. 30, 38.

as to when and where to bring the animals. Even a barber had assisted by making wigs for the slaves. Vesey also had twice written to St. Domingo, telling of his plans and asking aid. All who opposed were to be killed, for "‘he that is not with me is against me’ was their creed."⁸⁵ There was certainly also a plan to rescue the leaders;⁸⁶ and, according to one source,⁸⁷ on the day of Vesey’s execution "Another attempt at insurrection was made but the State troops held the slaves in check. So determined, however, were they to strike a blow for liberty that it was found necessary for the federal government to send soldiers to maintain order." Contemporary evidence in only the second point has been found.⁸⁸

There was trouble outside Charleston this same year. It might have been in part the work of the Negroes whom Vesey had enlisted for the revolt in July and could not warn of the change. The *National Intelligencer* of July 23 told of the execution of three Negroes in Jacksonboro, forty miles west of Charleston. An item of August 24 gave notice of the Governor’s reward of \$200 for the killing or capturing of fifteen or twenty armed Negroes harassing the planters.⁸⁹ *Niles’ Weekly Register* of September 28 said: "It appears that an insurrection of the blacks was contemplated at Beaufort, South Carolina, and that ten Negroes belonging to the most respectable families were arrested. The town council was in secret session. Particulars had not transpired." They rarely did. Tighten restrictive laws, get rid of as many free Negroes as possible, keep the slaves ignorant, hang the leaders, banish others, whip, crop, scourge scores, and above all keep it secret, or if you must talk, speak of the slaves’ contentedness and docility: Such was the attitude of the ruling class. On this particular occasion one ingenious pamphleteer⁹⁰ suggested that Negro slaves be strictly forbidden to attend fourth of July celebrations!

We must know the circumstances surrounding the revolt led by Nat Turner in Virginia in 1831 to understand the panic that fol-

⁸⁵ Kennedy and Parker, p. 32-33; 37-40.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁸⁷ *Harper’s Encyclopedia of United States History*, 1902, x, p. 53-54.

⁸⁸ *Richmond Enquirer*, August 3, 1822, quoting *Charleston Courier* (n. d.) and August 23, 1822, quoting *Charleston City Gazette* (n. d.).

⁸⁹ *National Intelligencer* (Washington), August 24; *Richmond Enquirer*, August 30, 1822.

⁹⁰ (E. C. Holland), *Practical Considerations . . . Relative to the Slave Population of South Carolina*, 1823, p. 33, note.

lowed.⁹¹ The ten preceding years had been marked by a severe depression. In 1825-30, the prices of cotton and slaves reached the lowest point they were to touch until the Civil War. Slave trading, a very important industry in Virginia, dwindled and to the local consternation the Negro population grew more rapidly than did the white. British anti-slavery agitation increased, Mexico abolished slavery in 1829, and attempts were made by Mexico and Colombia (apparently backed by England and France), to acquire Puerto Rico and Cuba and wipe out slavery there. Moreover, from 1825 to 1832 there were slave revolts and plots in Venezuela, Brazil, Cuba, Martinique, and the British West Indies (Tortola, Antigua, and Jamaica), as well as in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Tennessee and Louisiana. (See Table on p. 538. It was due to the urging of some of these states that additional federal troops were sent into Louisiana and Virginia in the spring of 1831. They soon saw service in the Nat Turner revolt.

Nat Turner was born October 2, 1800, and at the time of the revolt was described as follows:

5 feet 6 or 8 inches high, weighs between 150 and 160 pounds rather bright complexion, but not a mulatto, broad shoulders, large flat nose, large eyes, broad flat feet, rather knock-kneed, walks brisk and active, hair on the top of the head very thin, no beard, except on the upper lip and the top of the chin, a scar on one of his temples, also one on the back of his neck, a large knot on one of the bones of his right arm, near the wrist, produced by a blow.

Turner was an intelligent and gifted man who could not reconcile himself to the status quo. His religion offered him a rationalization for his rebellious feelings and, knowing how to read, he immersed himself in the stories of the Bible. In 1826 or 1827 he ran away, as his father had done successfully, and stayed away for one month. He then returned for ". . . the Spirit appeared to me and said I had my wishes directed to the things of this world, and not to the kingdom of Heaven, and that I should return to the service of my earthly master. . . ." But the other Negroes ". . . found fault, and murmured against me, saying that if they had my sense they would not serve any master in the world."

⁹¹ Substantiation and amplification of everything said in connection with this will be found in the writer's master thesis, Columbia, February, 1937. Footnotes are therefore omitted.

May 12, 1828, while working in the fields, Turner

heard a loud noise in the heavens, and the Spirit instantly appeared to me and said the Serpent was loosened, and Christ had laid down the yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and that I should take it on and fight against the Serpent, for the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first.

Ques. Do you not find yourself mistaken now? *Ans.* Was not Christ crucified. . . .⁹²

The solar eclipse of February 12, 1831, was his sign. This fact permits J. C. Ballagh to refer to the superstitious character of the "negro intelligence." As a matter of fact a contemporary (white) newspaper tells of a sermon which claimed that "during the eclipse the whole city (New York) South of Canal-Street would sink. Some persons actually went to the upper part of the City."

Turner then told four slaves that it was time to prepare the revolt. July fourth was selected. This leads another writer, W. H. Parker, to cry, "Shame! shame!" for he believes that Negroes in fighting for freedom would "pervert that sacred day"! But Turner was ill on the "sacred day" and he waited for another sign. This came on August 13, in the peculiar greenish blue color of the sun. A meeting was called for Sunday, August 21. Turner arrived last and noticed a newcomer. "I saluted them on coming up, and asked Will how came he there, he answered, his life was worth no more than others, and his liberty as dear to him. I asked him if he meant to obtain it? He said he would, or lose his life. This was enough to put him in full confidence." Such were the "bandits," as the governor and press called them, that Turner led. In the evening of that Sunday this group of six slaves started on their crusade against slavery by killing Turner's master, Joseph Travis, together with his family. Within twenty-four hours, some seventy Negroes, several mounted, had covered an area of twenty miles and had killed about sixty men, women and children.⁹³ When within three miles of the Southampton county seat, Jerusalem (now called

⁹² The questioner was T. R. Gray, Turner's counsel, who published 50,000 copies of the Confessions. The pamphlet was not permitted in the South and, so far as is known, only two exist, one in the 135th street branch of the New York Library, one in Virginia State Library, Richmond.

⁹³ Writers who apologize for slavery and glance over the slaughter of Negroes that followed this revolt, dilate at length upon this "horrible" killing. Yes, it was terrible, but it was a revolt, and as Steffens remarked to Debs, who objected to bloodshed in the Russian Revolution, "True, 'Gene. That's all true that you say. A revolution is no gentleman."

Courtland), there was, against Turner's advice, a fatal delay, and the Negroes, whose guns, said the *Richmond Compiler* of August 29, were not "fit for use" were overwhelmed by volunteer and state troops. Soon hundreds of soldiers, including United States troops and cavalry, swarmed over the county and, together with the inhabitants, killed more than one hundred slaves. Some of these "in the agonies of Death declared that they was going happy fore that God had a hand in what they had been doing . . ." The slaughter ended when the commanding officer, General Eppes, threatened martial law.

Though he never left the county, Turner was not caught until October 30. By November 5, after pleading not guilty, for, as he said, he did not feel *guilty*, Jeremiah Cobb had sentenced him to "be hung by the neck until you are dead! dead! dead!" on November 11. Turner went calmly to his death, the seventeenth slave to be legally executed (three free Negroes also were hanged). Other slaves were arrested, tortured or executed in Virginia, North Carolina, Delaware, Maryland, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, Louisiana and Mississippi. The revolt and the panic and terror that followed were the first important overt events fostering an open and decisive break between the North and the South, leading to severe repressive laws in every one of the border and southern states, the disappearance of southern anti-slavery societies, the appearance of scores in the North, the temporary strengthening of the colonization movement, a growth in Virginia sectionalism, clearly shown in the debates of 1831-32, and minor population movements, particularly of free Negroes, out of the slave states. As a tradition the Turner revolt has had and continues to have influence, the most important instance of this being its influence on John Brown.

There is evidence⁹⁴ that, in North Carolina and Virginia, the rebellious spirit extended to whites in common with Negroes. Nothing so frightened the rulers of the South as the possibility of the effective unity of the exploited, white and black, and the hints of it at this time furthered the policy of complete control and very strict censorship of all opposition to slavery within the South that prevailed from 1832 to the end of the Civil War.

The slaveholders of Madison and Hinds counties, in the center of Mississippi became uneasy in June, 1835, due to rumors of an im-

⁹⁴ Cf. *Niles Weekly Register*, xvi, p. 180 (October 15, 1831). Governor Floyd in his legislative message of December 6, 1831, stated that the unrest was "not confined to the

pending uprising. In that month a lady of the former county reported to her neighbors that she had overheard the following alarming statements of one of her slaves: "she wished to God it was all over and done with; that she was tired of waiting on the *white folks*, and wanted to be her own mistress the balance of her days, and clean up her own house."⁹⁵ A favorite slave was sent among the others as a spy and soon accused one Negro. This Negro "after receiving a most severe chastisement" confessed that a plot for a revolt had been formed and implicated a Mr. Blake and his slaves. One of that gentleman's slaves "was severely whipped by order of the (Vigilance) committee, but refused to confess anything—alleging all the time, that if they wanted to know what his master had told him, they might whip on until they killed him; that he had promised him that he would never divulge it."⁹⁶ Other slaves were tortured and it was finally discovered that there was a general plot of the slaves and that a number of white men were implicated. During July about fifteen slaves and six white men were hanged, the latter including two steam doctors,⁹⁷ Joshua Cotton and William Saunders, who appear to have been members of the gang of the notorious John Murrell. This last-named individual was the leader of a band of desperadoes operating in many of the slave states. They would help a Negro escape, then kidnap him and sell him back into slavery. According to the reported confession of Cotton, "Our object in undertaking to excite the negroes to rebellion, was not for the purpose of liberating them, but for plunder." It appears, however, that two of the whites, A. L. Donovan and R. Blake, actually hated slavery.⁹⁸

In 1840 there was intense excitement in the central and south central parts of Louisiana. The New Orleans *Picayune* of September 1 states, "Four hundred slaves living in the parish of Iberville, Louisiana, were induced on the 25th ultimo, to rise against their masters, but they were easily put down, forty were placed in confinement and slaves." (Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of Slave Power in America*), I, p. 191; *J. Negro Hist.*, xvi, p. 163.

⁹⁵ H. R. Howard, *The History of V. A. Stewert* . . . appendix to this is "proceedings . . . Madison County . . . 1835 . . ." Quotation is from p. 224.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 226-27.

⁹⁷ Medical treatment by steam was, at this time, almost as common, though not as reputable, as bleeding.

⁹⁸ *Loc. cit.* ⁹⁶, p. 232-33; *Memoir of S. S. Prentiss*, I, p. 161-62; Sydmor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, p. 246, 251. The activities of Murrell are described in the body of Howard's book.

twenty sentenced to be hung." A letter of August 26 remarks that twenty-nine slaves were to be hung in Rapides and Avoyelles parishes. "A negro man . . . confessed, after being taken up, that he had intended, if successful, to whip his master to death. The whole country was constantly patrolled by citizens."⁹⁹ According to Solomon Northup,¹⁰⁰ a free Negro who was kidnaped in Washington and arrived in this region in 1841, the Negroes had planned a mass flight, presumably to Mexico, but when all preparations had been made, the leader, Lew Cheney, "In order to curry favor with his master" betrayed the plot. "The fugitives were surrounded . . . carried in chains to Alexandria (in Rapides) and hung by the populace. Not only those, but many who were suspected, though entirely innocent, were taken from the field and from the cabin, and without the shadow of process or form of trial hurried to the scaffold." A regiment of soldiers was required to stop the slaughter. "Lew Cheney escaped, and was even rewarded for his treachery . . . his name is despised and execrated by all his race throughout the parishes of Rapides and Avoyelles."

During the six years preceding the Civil War there were reports of slave conspiracies and revolts in Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, Kentucky, Missouri, and Tennessee. The greatest excitement was during the presidential campaign years of 1856 and 1860 and some reports are of doubtful validity. But enough remains to warrant the statement that Negro restlessness was characteristic. The excitement in 1856 started in Texas in September, ran through Arkansas, Louisiana, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Virginia, and reached its height in December, especially in Kentucky and Tennessee. Probably thousands were arrested, certainly hundreds were lashed and tortured, and at least sixty were killed.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Printed in New York *Evening Post*, September 11, 12, 14, 1840.

¹⁰⁰ *Twelve Years a Slave*, p. 246 ff.

¹⁰¹ For references to this see: F. L. Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas*, p. 503-04; his *Journey in the Back Country*, p. 475; *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, xi, p. 50, 343-344; New Orleans *Picayune* from September, 1856, to February, 1857; New York *Weekly Tribune* for November and December, 1856; Phillips, *Plantation and Frontier*, ii, p. 116; *Annual Report of the American Anti-slavery Society*, 1857-58, p. 78; Catterall, ii, p. 565-66; *Journal of Southern History*, i, p. 43-44; S. Ellis, *Solitary Horseman*, p. 209. Typical errors and distortion by understatement are in C. Patterson, *Negro in Tennessee*, p. 50; I. E. McDougale, *Slavery in Kentucky*, p. 43.

Preceding, during and following the John Brown raid the excitement was extraordinary.¹⁰² The facts pertinent to this paper, concerning that raid, may be briefly stated. While his biographers¹⁰³ have pointed out that Nat Turner was one of the immortal old man's heroes, none has mentioned the later risings of the slaves, particularly those of 1856, as having influenced him. But there is evidence that one of Brown's most trusted followers, Charles P. Tidd, had received a letter¹⁰⁴ at Tabor, Iowa, from E. W. Clarke, dated December 25, 1856, in which this occurred: "The slaves are in a state of insurrection all over the country. Every paper brings us accounts of their plots for a general uprising."

It is likely that this in part explains Brown's feelings, expressed August, 1857, that the Negroes would immediately respond to his efforts though no preparatory notice had been given them. He told W. A. Phillips (who felt that the Negroes were a "peaceful, domestic, inoffensive race . . . incapable of reprisal"), that "You have not studied them right, and you have not studied them long enough."¹⁰⁵ We must also remember that Brown's most famous exploit before Harper's Ferry was his forcible freeing of eleven slaves in Missouri in 1858 and guiding them to Canada. This was undertaken at the request of one of the Negroes and could not have been carried out had it not been for the fighting spirit of these men and women.

The raid would not have been possible without the counsel of such Negroes as Douglass, Gloucester, Smith, Still, Garnett,¹⁰⁶ who also raised funds. The raiding party itself contained five Negroes, four escaped slaves returning to slave territory, Copeland, Leary, Anderson, Green, and one free Negro, Newby, who was spurred on by the desire to free his own children and wife, who had but recently written him,—"come this fall without fail, money or no money I want to see you so much; that is one bright hope I have before me."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² See *Missouri Democrat*, December 29, 1859; *Principia* (New York) for 1860; Flanders, *Plantation Slavery in Georgia*, p. 275; *New York Weekly Tribune* for 1860; *Journal of Southern History*, I, p. 47; *American Historical Review*, xxxvi, p. 763; A. C. Cole, *The Irrepressible Conflict*, p. 77-78; *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 2nd session, p. 74. Typical understatement is in Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, p. 487-88; J. H. Brown, *History of Texas*, I, p. 385.

¹⁰³ Redpath, p. 38, 145; Du Bois, p. 87; Wilson, p. 357.

¹⁰⁴ *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, xi, p. 343-44.

¹⁰⁵ O. G. Villard, *John Brown*, p. 313, 362.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

¹⁰⁷ Warren, *John Brown*, p. 343-44.

Dallas was destroyed by fire in July, 1860, and this was attributed to the slaves. Three Negroes, Sam, Cato, and Patrick, were executed: ¹⁰⁸

As they passed through the town they surveyed with composure the ruins of the once flourishing town that now lay a blackened mass before them . . . They met their fate with a composure worthy of a better cause. Patrick, with unparalleled nonchalance, died with a chew of tobacco in his mouth, and refused to make any statement whatever.

The story of four years ago was repeated and literally thousands of slaves were tortured, lashed, banished, murdered. Every plot or revolt or supposed conspiracy was blamed upon the Black Republican Party. The Senator from Texas, Wigfall, said (December 12, 1860): ¹⁰⁹

We say to those States that you shall not . . . permit men to go there [south] and excite your citizens to make John Brown raids or bring fire and strychnine within the limits of the State to which I owe allegiance. You shall not publish newspapers and pamphlets to excite our slaves to insurrection. . . . We will have peace . . . (or) withdraw from the Union."

But some Southerners, as well as Northerners, doubted the existence of such a plot. Thus a letter from Lamar County, Texas, of September, 1860, declared: ¹¹⁰

It is the opinion of many of our citizens, after mature deliberation, and thorough investigation . . . that these reports had their origin in the minds of scheming politicians, and are a part of that great plan concocted and being put in execution to nerve the Southern arms and excite the Southern mind, preparatory to precipitating the cotton States into a revolution.

When it is remembered that many of those arms and minds, belonging to the southern poor whites were becoming increasingly opposed ¹¹¹ to slavery the need of such a concoction is clearer. Northerners, however, began to wonder whether the South might not require their aid in putting down the revolts. Senator Doolittle of Wisconsin thought the Constitution required this, but Congressman Giddings of Ohio replied that if liberation would most effectively *protect* the inhabitants, the slaves should be freed. This he called a "remedy" for

¹⁰⁸ *Principia*, August 11, 1860.

¹⁰⁹ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 2nd session, p. 73.

¹¹⁰ *Louisville Democrat* (n. d.), quoted in *Principia*, November 10.

¹¹¹ Olmsted, *Journey in the Back Country*, p. 180.

slave revolts; but it was not a remedy calculated to increase the slaveholder's love for the Union.¹¹² Greeley in the *New York Weekly Tribune* of December 13, 1856, had stated, "They ask for more territory to be subject to the taskmaster and his cruelties, to the slave and his insurrections . . . what claim will the South have on the North when insurrections do come?"

Moreover, the insecurity of its labor supply was a major factor in reducing the profitableness of the slave system. And it was to raise this profitableness that the South clung to its policy of expansion. And expansion diffused the slave population, and thus decreased the danger of revolt. After secession a completely unashamed and unmitigated policy of suppressing all opposition to slavery might be instituted free from the annoying criticism of the abolitionists. If there should be a greater possibility of escape for fugitive slaves into a nearby foreign land, this would be compensated by a renewal of the African slave trade which, in the fifties, was increasingly demanded.

Although there are evidences of revolts of slaves during the Civil War in Kentucky and Arkansas (1861), Virginia and South Carolina (1862), Georgia (1864), and suspicious fires in Charleston (1861), Richmond (1864), Columbia (1865),¹¹³ probably the main forms of the Negro's struggle against slavery at this period were flight and enlistment in the federal army. Hundreds of thousands of slaves ran away in the years 1861-65, although for more than the first year the Union army acted as a huge slave-catching organization. Though Negroes were not accepted into the Union forces until almost two years of the war had gone by (and then under disadvantageous conditions), still by the end of the war there were over 186,000 Negroes fighting in the Union army, more than 104,000 of whom were recruited in Confederate territory.¹¹⁴ We have the word of Lincoln himself that if it were not for these thousands of dark hands that eagerly grasped guns and heroically¹¹⁵ wielded them, the North might not have won.

Indeed, John Brown's idea that slavery was war had considerable

¹¹² *New York Evening Post*, September 27, 1860; *Principia*, November 3, 1860.

¹¹³ *Principia*, May 18, June 1, December 21, 1861; S. J. Ravenal, *Charleston*, p. 496; *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, xi, p. 233-36; Flanders . . . *Georgia*, p. 275; A. C. Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 399; J. Rhodes, *Historical Essays*, p. 301-13; *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, viii, p. 195-214; *The War of the Rebellion*, Series I, xiv, p. 291, 306.

¹¹⁴ *Journal of Negro History*, xi, p. 575-76; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, *passim*; H. A. Trexler, *Slavery in Missouri*, p. 206.

¹¹⁵ See *The War of the Rebellion*, Series I, xiv, p. 190, 194, 198, 226.

concrete justification. During slavery the South was a dictatorial oligarchy¹¹⁶ which terrorized the slaves and suppressed their frequent insubordination and revolts. The fear of such rebelliousness was a persistent factor in the life of the South which has too long been overlooked by social historians. The facts presented here certainly refute the stereotype of a docile Negro slave;¹¹⁷ the American Negro consistently and courageously struggled against slavery in every possible way and he must continue in this tradition if he is to break down the barriers of discrimination today.

REPORTED AMERICAN NEGRO SLAVE CONSPIRACIES AND REVOLTS

(Those treated in the text are denoted by asterisk; references are selective, not exhaustive.)

Date	Locality	Date	Locality
1663	Va.	1710	Va.
1672	Va.	1711	S. C.
1680s	Va., N. Y.	1712*	N. Y.
1687	Va.	1713	S. C.
to 1688	Md.	1720	Mass., S. C.
1690s	Va., Mass.	1722	Va.
1694	Va.	1723	Mass., Conn., Va.
1702	N. Y.	1730	Va., S. C., La.
1705	Md.	1732	La.
1708*	N. Y.	1734	S. C., Pa., N. J.
1709	Va.	1737	Pa., S. C.
		1738	S. C.

¹¹⁶ Olmsted, . . . *Back Country*, p. 62, 264, 444.

¹¹⁷ Among recent works, Catterall (I, p. 54, note 7) explicitly denies docility; Bancroft (*Slave Trading* . . . , p. 17, 41, 277, 283-84) implicitly.

¹¹⁸ Hening, *Statutes*, II, p. 204, 299; Ballagh, p. 79; Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, p. 472; H. Henry, *Police Control*, p. 148; *William and Mary College Quarterly*, x, p. 177-78; Brackett, *Negro in Maryland*, p. 92; J. Coffin, . . . *Newbury* . . . , p. 153; P. A. Bruce, *Economic History*, II, p. 116, 118.

¹¹⁹ A. Northrup, *Slavery in New York*, p. 260-61; J. Scharf, *Maryland*, I, 375; *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, I, p. 129.

¹²⁰ *Executive journals . . . council . . . colony of Virginia*, III, p. 236; Hening, III, p. 537-38; H. L. Osgood, *American Colony in Eighteenth Century*, II, p. 218; (E. C. Holland), *A Refutation* . . . , p. 28-29, 63; *Journal of Southern History*, I, p. 458; D. Wallace, *South Carolina*, I, p. 372.

¹²¹ *Doc. rel. col. hist.*, N. Y., v, p. 610; *Coll. S. C. Hist. Soc.*, I, p. 252; Wallace, I, p. 372; J. Coffin, *An Account* . . . , p. 9; *Va. Hist. Register*, IV, p. 63; Hening, IV, p. 126 ff.; *Boston Weekly News-Letter*, April 4-11, May 2-9, 9-16, July 4-11, August 8-15, October 10-18, November 14-21, 1723; Ballagh, p. 72 note.

¹²² Gayarre, *op. cit.*, I, p. 440; *Va. Mag. of Hist. and Biog.*, XXXII, p. 323; XXXVI, p. 345-46; *Boston Gazette*, October 19-26, 1730; La Roy Sunderland, *Anti-slavery Manual* (1837), p. 84; Coffin, *An Account* . . . , p. 14; Martin, *La.*, I, p. 295-96; *Archives of New Jersey*, 1st Series, XI, p. 335-37, 340-42; Wallace, I, p. 372; *Minutes of Provincial Council of Pennsylvania*, IV, p. 259; Flanders, *op. cit.*, p. 24, 273.

REPORTED AMERICAN NEGRO SLAVE CONSPIRACIES AND REVOLTS

(Those treated in the text are denoted by an asterisk; references are selective, not exhaustive.)

Date	Locality	Date	Locality
1739 } 1740* } 1741* }	*S. C., Md. S. C. N. Y., N. J.	1792 } 1793 } 1795*	Va. Va. La.
1747 } 1755-6 } 1759 }	S. C. Va. S. C.	1796 } 1797 } 1799 }	N. J., N. Y. Va., S. C. Va.
1760 } 1761 } 1765 } 1766 } 1767 } 1768 }	S. C. S. C. S. C. S. C. Va. Mass.	1800* 1801-2* 1803 } 1804 }	Va., N. C., S. C. Va., N. C. Pa. Pa., Ga., La.
1771-2 } 1774 } 1775 }	Ga., N. J. Ga., Mass. *N. C., S. C.	1805-6 } 1807 } 1808 } 1809 } 1810 }	N. C., S. C., Va. Miss. Va. Va. Va., Ga.
1776* 1778 } 1779 }	Ga. N. Y. Ga., N. J.	1811* 1812 } 1813 } 1814 }	La. Va. Va. Va.
1782 } 1786 } 1787 }	Va. Ga., Va. S. C.		

¹²³ H. Catterall, *Judicial Cases* . . . , iv, p. 35; J. Brackett, *Negro in Maryland*, p. 93-94.

¹²⁴ *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, xxxi, p. 219; *Official Records of Dinwiddie*, II, p. 101-03, 474; W. Schaper, *Sectionalism* . . . S. C., p. 310; Coffin, p. 15.

¹²⁵ Wallace, *South Carolina*, I, p. 374, III, p. 509; *State Records of North Carolina*, XI, p. 226; *Boston Chronicle*, January 11-18, 1768; G. Moore . . . Mass., p. 129.

¹²⁶ Cooley, p. 43-44; *Letters of Mrs. Adams*, I, p. 24; *Plantation and Frontier*, II, p. 118-19; *Colonial Records of Georgia*, XII, p. 146-47, 325-26; Wallace, *Laurens*, p. 120, note 2.

¹²⁷ *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, VIII, p. 6-7; W. B. Stevens, *Georgia*, II, p. 317; E. F. Hatfield, *History of Elizabeth, New Jersey*, p. 476.

¹²⁸ *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, III, p. 149; Stevens, *op. cit.*, II, p. 376-78; *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, IV, p. 132; Wallace, *South Carolina*, II, p. 415.

¹²⁹ *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, V, p. 488-89, 534-35, 540, 542, 546-47, 552, 555, 624-25, 651; *William and Mary Quarterly* (1st Series), XX, p. 275.

¹³⁰ J. Atkinson, *Newark*, p. 171; H. M. Henry, *op. cit.*, 150; A. Steward, *Twenty-two Years a Slave*, p. 34-38; *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, VI, p. 51-52; Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, p. 188-89.

¹³¹ E. R. Turner, *Negro in Pennsylvania*, p. 152-53; Channing, *United States*, V, p. 134; Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 476; *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, VII, p. 224.

¹³² J. Bassett, *Slavery in State of North Carolina*, p. 95-96; *Annual Report Am. Historical Association*, 1896, I, p. 881-82; Ballagh, *Virginia*, p. 109; *William and Mary College Quarterly* (1), VIII, p. 219; *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, VII, p. 437.

¹³³ D. Rowland, *Mississippi*, II, p. 634; *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, X, p. 31, 62-63; Flanders, *Georgia*, p. 274.

¹³⁴ *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, X, p. 120-23, 217, 223, 241, 279, 367, 387-88; G. P. Coleman, *Virginia Silhouettes*, p. 21.

REPORTED AMERICAN NEGRO SLAVE CONSPIRACIES AND REVOLTS

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Date		Locality	Date		Locality
1816*		Va., Fla., S. C.	1836	} 140	Ga., Tenn.
1819	135	Ga., S. C.	1837		La.
1820	} 136	Fla.	1840	141	* La., D. C., N. C., Va.
1821		N. C.	1841-3	} 142	La., Ga., Miss.
1822*		S. C., Va.	1845		Md.
1824	} 137	Va.	1851		Ga.
1826		Miss., N. C.	1854	} 143	Ala.
1827		Ga.	1855		Md., La., Mo., Ga., S. C.
1829	} 138	Ky., Va., S. C., N. C.	1856*		all over
1830		Miss., Md., N. C., La., Tenn.	1857	} 144	Md.
1831*		all over	1859		John Brown
1833	} 139	Va.	1860*		all over
1835		*Miss., S. C., Ga., La.	1861-65*		

There were also many uprisings on boats. Only fairly successful ones appear to have been reported—as in 1730, 1731, 1732, 1747, 1761, 1826, 1830, 1839, 1841.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁵ Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, p. 477, 510; *Plantation and Frontier*, II, p. 91.

¹³⁶ Catterall, II, p. 327-28; Bassett, *op. cit.*, p. 96; Ashe, *North Carolina*, II, p. 281-82.

¹³⁷ J. Russell, *Free Negro*, p. 169; Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, p. 149; *Niles' Register*, XXXI, p. 192; *African Repository*, III, p. 157.

¹³⁸ *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, x, p. 567-69; *Tyler's Quarterly History Magazine*, I, p. 14; *Niles' Register*, XXXVI, p. 53; XXXVII, p. 18-19, 277; XXXVIII, p. 157; Catterall, II, p. 340-41; *American Slavery as It Is*, p. 51; Hart, *Slavery and Abolition*, p. 116; *The Liberator* (Boston), January 1, 15, March 19, 1831; Sydnor, p. 116; Scarborough, p. 89; *Senate Document 209*, 57th Congress, 2nd session, p. 56, 261-64.

¹³⁹ *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, x, p. 587; *Niles' Register*, XLVIII, p. 149; XLIX, p. 331; E. P. Burke, *Reminiscences of Georgia*, p. 156-58.

¹⁴⁰ Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, p. 485; *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, VII, p. 223, and for January, 1937; *Niles' National Register*, LIII, p. 129.

¹⁴¹ *New York Post*, August 27, September 8, 1840; *Van Buren Manuscripts*, letter of September 11, 1840, Library of Congress.

¹⁴² R. B. Flanders, *op. cit.*, p. 275; Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, p. 486; Brackett, *Maryland*, p. 96; *Niles' National Register*, LX, p. 368, 384; LXIII, p. 212; LXVIII, p. 293.

¹⁴³ *New York Weekly Tribune*, September 16, 1854; Trexler, *op. cit.*, p. 72-73; *Plantation and Frontier*, II, p. 120; Brackett, *op. cit.*, p. 97; Catterall, III, p. 648-49.

¹⁴⁴ Brackett, *Negro in Maryland*, p. 97.

¹⁴⁵ *Boston Gazette*, April 26-May 3, 1731; *Boston Weekly News-Letter*, October 27-November 2, 1732; Coffin, *An Account . . .*, p. 14, 15, 34; F. Bancroft, *Slavetrading*, p. 41, 277; *Niles' Register*, XXXVIII, p. 328; a bibliography of the *Creole* (1841) is in G. H. Barnes & D. Dumond, *Letters . . . Weld . . . Grimké*, II, p. 886 note.

The article by Dr. Paul Radin on "Economic Factors in Primitive Religion," published in the Spring issue, is a chapter from his book, *Primitive Religion*, published by Viking Press.